

FROM THE JOURNAL'S NATIONAL POLICY.

DIG THE NICARAGUA CANAL (Preliminary Work Under Way).

By a waterway bringing our Eastern and Western coasts into free communication our naval strength will be doubled and our commercial difficulties halved.

BEGIN THE NICARAGUA CANAL THIS WINTER.

When the Journal on Sunday published the full official text of the report of the Nicaragua Canal Commission it appreciated, of course, the news value of the document, but it had a more important object in view than a mere news triumph. It had received trustworthy information that the intention at Washington was to postpone the digging of the canal. The influences so powerful in the Republican party, especially the railroads, had brought such pressure upon the authorities that it seemed probable that the lesson of the tremendous voyage of the Oregon would be ignored. The final report of the Commission was to be withheld for a year, so that Congress would have no opportunity to act upon it at its coming session.

The Journal resolved that this sacrifice of the public interests should not be accomplished. It determined to secure and publish the Nicaragua report in order that the people might have the same information possessed by the Government—that they might know authoritatively that the canal could be built at a reasonable cost and that Nicaragua was the best place for it, and so that public opinion might be concentrated upon Congress in a demand for its construction without further delay.

The report of the Walker Commission shows that Lake Nicaragua, that splendid inland sea that almost bisects the isthmus, was formerly an arm of the Pacific. When the lake was elevated and its outflow diverted to the Atlantic an alluvial formation was left on the Pacific side, so that the excavations in that quarter will be not only short but easy. The strip of territory to be cut is only twelve miles wide, and part of that is already penetrated by river channels.

On the Atlantic side there is already direct water communication between the lake and the ocean, by way of the San Juan River. This river can be made navigable for the largest ocean steamers for the greater part of its length. Dredges, dams and locks will convert it into a perfect ship canal.

The principal objections raised against the Nicaragua route by the railroad literary bureaus are:

1. That the cost of construction would be extravagant.
2. That there would have to be so many locks as to increase the cost of operation and the time of transit beyond measure.
3. That the climate is so unhealthy that laborers cannot work in it without excessive mortality.
4. That the construction of the great dam at Ochoa by which the water of the summit level is to be impounded would be impracticable.
5. That the harbor of Greytown cannot be kept open.

1. The Commission disposes of the first of these objections by its estimate that the total cost of the canal would be only \$118,113,790. This includes an allowance of 20 per cent for contingencies. The actual amount of the estimated items is only \$98,428,158. This is about the cost of seven or eight months of Otis in the Philippines. The interest on it would be less than a third the cost of transporting a single Pacific Coast wheat crop to market. The farmers of California are paying nearly nine dollars per ton at present to send their wheat to Europe in sailing vessels. In the year ending June 30, 1898, 1,150,000 tons of wheat, 200,000 tons of other grain and 2,000,000 barrels of flour were shipped from the Pacific Coast. At present rates that would cost the shippers nearly \$15,000,000 in freight charges. The interest on the cost of the canal would hardly exceed \$3,500,000 a year at the outside.

2. The plan recommended by the Commission requires the construction of only ten locks, four on the Pacific side, each with a lift of 29 feet, and six on the Atlantic side, with a lift of 18.41 feet each. Modern methods make the lockage an easy and rapid operation.

3. The Commission finds that the climate along the route of the canal is remarkably healthy. "The local conditions," says the report, "are such that, with ordinary hygienic precautions, the risk from disease is slight. The frequent rainfall on the east coast furnishes an ample supply of fresh, soft water, condensed directly from the clouds; the porous, sandy soil absorbs it so rapidly as to prevent stagnation, while animal refuse is quickly removed by the scavenger birds and fish continually on the alert for food."

"With their light, loose clothing, vegetable diet and cleanly habits, the natives seldom suffer from fevers. Even our unacclimated Americans passing from a rigorous Winter temperature to the mild region of the trade winds were, with few exceptions, exempt from febrile complaints, and among the large number of engineers sent out there was no mortality in the country."

"The constant motion of the wind, sweeping through this low divide, appears to remove the noxious exhalations which characterize other portions of the isthmus. Yellow fever finds no habitat at Greytown, and even when imported it does not become epidemic."

4. A new location for the Ochoa dam has been found which so simplifies the work of construction that there are no longer any serious difficulties, either engineering or financial, in that quarter. "The flowage line," the Commissioners say, "is almost continuous, requiring but one small embankment, while the section affords ample weir length. Good solid rock foundations exist at about fifteen feet below sea level. Thus the maximum height of the dam from the bottom of the foundation would be 138 feet."

"The construction of a dam at this point avoids the serious objections to the Ochoa site, and also reduces the cost and difficulties of construction."

5. As to the harbor of Greytown, keeping it clear of sand is declared to be merely a matter of suitable jetties, and an entrance judiciously selected.

When De Lesseps rejected the Nicaragua route and plunged into the financial bog of Panama, one of his chief arguments was that the Nicaragua Canal was not planned to meet the requirements of modern commerce. It was to be limited to vessels of comparatively small tonnage. The Walker Commission has changed all that. It has designed a canal that would accommodate the Campania or the St. Paul as easily as the Erie accommodates a two-mule canal boat. The minimum depth is to be 30 feet and the minimum width on the bottom 150 feet. The locks are to be 80 feet wide and 665 feet long. And the cost is to be little more than it was expected to be for the original second-class ditch.

In the last session of Congress the opponents of the Nicaragua Canal were driven to the wall. The experience of the Spanish war had united the country in an imperious demand for the construction of a waterway that would make it unnecessary to keep our navy in a state of vibration over a line fifteen thousand miles long. The people wanted no more Oregons racing from Puget Sound to Florida and back again in the midst of war. All the ostensible objections to the construction of the canal had been disposed of, and the one real objection—that an Isthmian canal would make shippers independent of the transcontinental railroads—could not be publicly advanced. In this strait there was only one resource of obstruction left—another Commission.

The isthmus from Tehuantepec to Panama had been combed by commissions for fifty years, but Speaker Reed seized upon this last chance of delay, and instead of a canal Congress gave the country a board. Well, that card is played, and there is no other in the pack. The second Walker Commission is going to adopt the report of the first upon Nicaragua, and that leaves absolutely no shred of excuse for any further delay. There is nothing for Congress to do now but to act, and act at once.

There are two imperative demands for the construction of the canal—commercial and naval—and either would be sufficient without the other. Indeed, even that small fraction of the commercial demand which comes from our Pacific States would be more than sufficient in itself. When the farmers of a single group of States are paying \$15,000,000 a year to get a part of their crops to market the wisdom of an investment that would save them half that expense at a cost of \$3,500,000 a year in interest is apparent.

But the Pacific States are not the only parts of the country with a commercial interest in the canal. Now that we are an Asiatic and an oceanic power the Nicaragua waterway will be more than ever a part of our coast line. It will bring Manila in touch with New York. It will put us in easy communication with Hong Kong and Yokohama. It will give us our share in the growing commerce of Australia and the west coast of South America.

From a naval point of view our possession of the canal will be equivalent to the construction and maintenance of at least ten battle ships and a proportionate number of cruisers and gunboats. It will unite our navy and give it the control of two oceans. From their secure haven in Lake Nicaragua our ships can descend at will upon either side of the world.

There has been enough of delay and enough of pottering with corporations. Let Congress appropriate money, at its next session for the construction of the Nicaragua Canal, and let it be the property of the whole people—a priceless treasure of the nation forever.

W. R. HEARST.